

Robert Curvin Interview
Interviewee: Richard Cammareri
Interviewer: Robert Curvin
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Robert Curvin: Okay, I have Richard Cammareri here, Newark native, longtime activist, informed citizen involved in organizing community development, education and um today's date is May eighth and we are gonna chat for a few minutes. So, Richard why don't you start by just telling us a little bit about your roots in Newark and um your family and how you got involved in community action.

Richard Cammareri: Um, let's see. I was wondering what an activist is or the activists. My roots in Newark, family long, I am told that my paternal grandparents arrived here in about 1899 from Southern Italy, um the same region where many Italian immigrants are from who arrived in Newark. Avelino, I believe whatever the name was, I have never been there. So, he arrived in 1899 and settled in what was then the third ward now is Central ward and that's where I wound up growing up. I was born in Presbyterian hospital later United hospital, now its empty, abandoned and owned by the county just um Bruce Street, between Cabinet and 12th avenue, a few blocks down from Old City Hospital which is still there structurally but now is part of College of Medicine-Dentistry. I was born in 51, childhood 50s. I am 60s. Um my mother's family stayed around here till we were displaced by the medical school. I tell people that when I grew up, my neighborhood was about fifty-fifty white, African American. It was a working-class neighborhood. An unusual neighborhood in terms of housing. It was one of the few that I had seen in Newark that were blocks and was connected in housing because we had, it was one of the few blocks I ever seen in Newark where we had actually connected brick housing. It wasn't the stick build housing, and just two-family houses. We had school teachers I know; I call and I'm still in touch with her. Dr. Henry and his wife D who lived across the street from us. I believe he might have been the first black member of the school board. He is ninety-four years old now, still very young, aware and with it. I have learned a lot from him these last few years. I think about fifty-fifty over the years, it became almost ninety percent African Americans. And then I tell people that it was a hundred percent white because we were the last family on the block before the block got knocked down, which is a shame, they demolished all the housing the brick-built housing. The lot stayed empty for about twenty-five years until the Community Agency Corporation, local CDC had built some rental houses there back in the mid or late 90s. So, my roots are here in Newark. My father's people are not too far, they were on the lower east side. They just could never get rid of me. I went to Rutgers-Newark, Essex County High School and I and always found Newark to be, I sometimes called it our cherished rules, but undying city. It is a place that

you can learn an awful lot and it is a place where you can from a community organizing perspective, which is what I got into as a young man graduating Rutgers. Um it can be a crucible for all kinds of interesting um potential, I don't want to say experimus, strategies, activating and organizing because it is so small and um it is easy to get to know a lot of people in Newark. I was um, I guess fortunate or unfortunate. When I began community organizing work in Ernest which we probably be in the early 80s because I first graduated college in 1973. I worked for a youth service program called quest, um Joycelyn, Cliff Carter were the directors of that, they started about '69. I first met them around '72 through the kid's corporation which was an initiative in the South Ward [] Avenue and um it was a summer school program. So, summers between college years, I worked over there. A good program So, I worked with them following graduation. Initially following graduation, I worked as a consultant, a fancy name but didn't mean that much for the, for Prudential, for Prudential company affairs department and this is '73. For two years, I was um, it was mainly education related activities, some tutoring programs we were putting together, and then I worked for quest starting in '75 it was, I think it was with them until '80 when I began to work. I was hired by the Newark Coalition for Neighborhoods which was a city-wide coalition of community-based organizations, community development corporations throughout the city. So, why I got involved with that I'm off next. I know I'm not exactly sure. I think it was a combination of the era I grew up in which was socially conscious in a very obvious way. Family background, there was nothing in particular that would have, at least on a surface level, that disposed me towards this work except I suspect, and I'm speculating here, my father died when I was sixteen it was in 1868. I suspect he was in Gary Bolden movement and he was an Italian immigrant who would never go to church, um it was a distinct skepticism of the catholic church. I later found out that it wasn't that unusual. That in fact, many Italians from Italy, the irony of course being that it is a catholic country, and also had the largest communist party in the Western world for a long time. So, interesting ironies and contradictions there but um Gary Boli is a man who I began to study very carefully as a figure of the man who once invited by Abraham Lincoln to become general in the United States in the civil war. He refused because he didn't believe Lincoln truly was fighting the war to free African Americans who had been enslaved. He had high standards and he was probably one of the most famous people in the 18th century around the world, but I digress.

Robert Curvin: Before we go on to Gary Boli, let me go back to um the 60s because you were born in the '51. I would assume that around 1965-66, you were becoming much more aware of the city, your environment, the political system. Do you remember Addonizio as the mayor of the city?

Richard Cammareri: Yes, I do have but as a teenager, I wasn't paying that much attention. It was very real to me and again people on the block were still the um. Starting in

the early around '63 or '64, the buzz about us having to be relocated because the medical school and that was very vivid and I recall people like Dr. Henry with petitions trying to get people to save our block. I didn't really know who Addonizio was, I knew the name. I have memories of Carlin and Addonizio election in '62. As a young kid, Italian kid and of course, I was rooting for the Italian guy just for ethnic tribe I supposed and he won. But my knowledge and awareness of that was limited, but it was real in terms of being concerned about where I lived, which I enjoyed very much. It was a great neighborhood.

Robert Curvin: What about 1967? Where were you then?

Richard Cammareri: Right there on Bruce Street, um we um during the rebellion, I recall that my father had a small glass store, auto glass store in Verona not too far Bloomfield Avenue and um it may have been I recall, speaking with some guys I played basketball with. Across the street was Bruce Street school for kids who couldn't hear or speak and that's um we called the deaf and dumb school. Um, we played basketball there every day and there were guys who lived further south close to Springfield Avenue, who the next day they played ball and they said man, we gotta talk about what had happened. That night we heard a lot of sirens of course. Then, sirens weren't typically unusual because we had a fire house a block away from the hospital, two blocks away so you are always hearing ambulances and fire engines. So, it didn't quite hit me until I did read the paper and it was very um, um, you know, it was sort of um, I'm trying to, someone else was asking me this, very odd sensation to let this, something this traumatic, this kind of thing seem ruthless and I had seen some of the clips that had happened in previous years in Harlem and in Bronx. Um, you just had a sense even at that age of something was happening, something was happening I guess to um [unclear] but I had no idea [unclear] as a young person but it really

Robert Curvin: In the course of the five days or so, do you remember feeling unsafe or being threatened in any way or were you out on the streets?

Richard Cammereri: I went out although I wasn't really on it because it didn't probably make sense as a white kid, a white person, I never felt unsafe. I knew all the people that I knew in my neighborhood, so I was a native. Even driving next day, I went with my father to work. I worked and helped him during the Summer and we drove up, I think whichever was, the third day they brought the national guard in, the third day and I recall that day being much more nervous about seeing these tanks, armored personnel, vehicles and national guards and I recall vividly driving up Central Avenue and um the guardsmen, there were just two of them looking young and raggedy starting in front of the bank that's now the Urban legal office in 8th street central avenue and thinking that um, then I saw a tank rolling down one of the streets. And again, it just reminded me of some of those old science fiction

movies from the 50s where you see there are soldiers running through an urban area and it seemed very odd. I had to admit that I never felt unsafe given the stories I heard from friends later, black friends. They never bothered us at all. My father and I driving up and down for obvious reasons. So, in our neighborhood, we were not near, we were about maybe a quarter mile away I guess from Springfield Avenue but there was nothing going on there, no looting that sort of thing.

Robert Curvin: So, how did your family react to this stuff, um this sudden burst of chaos in the city and then occupation by state police, national guard?

Richard Cammereri: You know its um; one would have thought about that because I recall my father and mother being awfully calm about it. Its um, I guess to some degree I was, and this may play into some of my attitudes overall. I was already fortunate and my family given the era, given the class, I was very fortunate, my family. I never heard them at least any kind of racial antipathy or animosity. I never heard the n-word used in my house except for some extended family members who did visit, but not from my father and mother which I think again I feel fortunate for that. And my father was a pretty calm type person and I assume that it will be over soon and that people will respond to it and the next thing will happen. So, there was no

Robert Curvin: But they didn't pack up?

Richard Cammereri: No, we stayed until we had to move when the university management pushed everybody out and so that was kind of the response in terms of the household. I never felt really unsafe or threatened. It was, I felt Manu Springfield Avenue, I knew the area, I knew some people who lived over there, some kid's friends of mine so I felt concerned about them especially when you saw. We had subscription to life magazine. Every week we get life magazine and that was our, one of our important news outlets. When I saw the cover of Joey Best the young boy who shot, the boy with the bear. It was really shocking because you see the street and that could be a street in anywhere, any city but it looked like Newark Street and it's this kid lying there bleeding so it's like what's going on, the world is been turned upside down because I didn't, I mean I didn't have any particular feeling about them, the police at the time, good or bad. Well, I guess the police are there to protect you and then help people, um after that even from my perspective, it was um because I hadn't experienced the kind of, not being black I hadn't experienced the kind of police brutality or disregard that obviously most many black people in the community had faced. But after that, you um, the scales on some of the trees have fallen off even my sixteen years old eyes at that point and things had changed for sure.

Robert Curvin: So, you were actually '61, '67, you were just sixteen?

Richard Cammereri: Um, I'll say fifteen going to sixteen

Robert Curvin: and then um if we fast forward to 1970, the election of Gibson, um was you at all politically active at that time?

Richard Cammereri: No, I was at Rutgers-Newark still on Bruce Street. I read the paper a lot so I knew what was going on at that time, and this was a very important election, a very special election but I wasn't directly involved in any way, in any campaign. Again, it was almost, living in Newark at that time, you just felt this kind of electrical continuum, you knew something very special was happening and obviously it did happen with Mayor Gibson's election.

Robert Curvin: So, you finished college, you started working with a non-profit after and then eventually you end up getting this job to run the neighborhood coalition or Newark coalition of neighborhoods organization?

Richard Cammereri: Well, at first, I wasn't the director. When I first came to Newark Coalition of the neighborhoods. That was interesting, that was the first citywide unified efforts to gather the community corporations that had organize in the 60s and 70s, and I think the tristate was organized in the '67 or '70 that was organized in 1966 or 1970, New community in '68, la Casa unified belt they were both in '71 and '72, the Ironbound Corporation, the Roseville corporation, which is not around anymore, Prospect community center which is now Community Agency Corporation which is still around um, they had kinda worked together here and there fitfully but in the late '79, they had a very large anti-crime march where it was very well done because they had people marching from various neighborhoods, from Ironbound, from Vailsburg, from Northward, from La Casa, from Central Ward to meet downtown at City Hall. And um I might still have a picture of that somewhere. As a result of that Newark Coalition of the neighborhood was formed. Um people like Becky, um Becky D [] were among the cooperators and that was the beginning of the first city wide coalition of neighborhood groups. It did include some grassroot organizations, some tenant block association but it was mainly the incorporated non-profit, CDC types. I went to work for them in 1980, '80 or '81. I was the director for what was called the Urban Crime Prevention Program [UCPP] which was a federal program throughout the country that enabled us to hire, it might have been close to fifty people. Each neighborhood had its own core that we hired and I supervise all of them to conduct crime prevention activities. Many of this turned out to be just good old-fashioned community organizing, block association organizing, tenant organizing with a focus obviously on crime prevention which would have happened anyway because you have, with any community organizing whether its Newark or any other area, the big five issues we've got: housing, healthcare, education, employment, and crime, public safety. So, using the public safety issue as the jumping off point, we helped in organizing a lot of block association and tenants' groups which

then also began to deal with the issues of housing whether they had poor landlords or issues with their local schools and it worked pretty well. We had a lot, like I said it was at least fifty people who were hired and they worked throughout the city. We had monthly meetings where people came together and shared the information of what's happening in their neighborhoods, on their blocks, um that program lasted about three, two years. The funding was cut I believe actually

Robert Curvin: Where did the funding come from? What agency?

Richard Cammereri: Um, the Law Enforcement Agency (LEAA), Law Enforcement Administration Agency I think, um and that money was there until the [unclear] won. I guess that was the second year of Reagan administration and um it was cut I believe that was one of the problems then but um I'll have to check on that eventually, but eventually the program was cut.

Robert Curvin: Do you have any evidence or data to show the impact of that kind of effort?

Richard Cammereri: Um, you know we did some evaluation based on the incident report of the police department generates on a monthly basis which seems to suggest that it probably wasn't as scientific as it could have been, but it seems to suggest that it had an impact in certain areas. For instance, reports had gone down on certain type of crimes. So, I think um, it was um, you know it was a useful program um and it showed the impact that real organizing could have had in terms of quality of life. It's hard to measure that in a city like Newark where the demographics and social economics was really crushing at that time in terms of poverty rate, per capita income, usual stuff but um I think we did pretty well. We had an um, it generated a lot of interest, generated a lot of jobs.

Robert Curvin: You have any record of what kind of skill, financing was available? Fifty people that's a lot of people

Richard Cammereri: I mean the wages were not high, it was um I can't recall I might need to find that out

Robert Curvin: and then the sponsor, the money came to the Newark Coalition of the Neighborhoods?

Richard Cammereri: Yes, it came to the Newark Coalition of the Neighborhoods and we had a physical conduit and provided, wrote out all the checks, did all the supplies. Actually, no one has ever called one out. We wrote checks out directly to the people who worked also they were our employees and then each agency also got some overhead money, administrative fees and um it worked pretty well. You know it was the first real test of the ability of groups to work formally together, structurally together. I mean organizing anti-crime

marches is not easy but it doesn't involve trusting people with your finances, paying your workers and that sort of thing. This was a good test and the group passed very well

Robert Curvin: What are some of the other critical areas that the coalition as a group got involved in?

Richard Cammereri: Um you know one of the things we did, and we did a lot of research in was housing for profits. There was a huge problem um in the late 70s when NCN was formed in the late 70s or early 80s. Absentee landlords were touching their buildings to get the insurance money. A lot of research, we had files for that stuff and gave it all to the prosecutor at the time and this was a little before I got into the Newark Coalition of the Neighborhoods, um, maybe a couple of years and I don't know, I was told by the people who worked on that, that nothing was done with it and whether it was a deficiency in the evidence we gathered. I can't remember who the prosecutor was, the county prosecutor at the time but nothing ever came of it, again perhaps for lack of evidence but that was clearly an issue

Robert Curvin: You were tracking tax debt verses probability of [unclear]

Richard Cammereri: Yes, um and it was um, there were national programs aiming to help us out, showed us the ways to research this kind of problem and that was um, that was one of the big issues that we were dealing it. The issue of housing was always high on the list in terms of organizing these block association and tenants' groups and we were fairly; it was positive on our end that we weren't just landlords' bashers but we understood that these landlords who lived in the building needed as much help as the tenants. Um, they were still dealing with the inability to get insurance, bank loans, red lining was still an issue with a lot of impact on the city. The city was obviously targeted. So, there were things we did around those issues.

Robert Curvin: Did you work with Frank Hutchins, from the [unclear], I just had a chance to talk to. Tell me a little bit about Frank from your perspective.

Richard Cammereri: Yea, Frank was um, He was one of the founders of, I think also of the Newark Coalition of Neighborhoods when he was the head of the, I think it was the Newark Tenants Association. They had an office which NCN later moved in to which was just in the building, I think the wards coffee building. I think Frank came from Philadelphia, he was um a long-time tenant organizer, I learned a lot from him when I first got to NCN just on basis, how to reach the people, setting up meetings. He was um, he was really tireless in terms of his work. I never saw him do anything else actually but working with tenants. Newark Tenants Association was one of the founding groups with the Newark Coalition of the Neighborhoods.

Robert Curvin: Did they organize tenant in public housing, private housing or both?

Richard Cammereri: Mainly private, public housing was a hard nut to crack because there you had the Newark Tenants Council, which you know actually the housing authority itself set up, so that in itself is a bit of a contradiction because the housing authority founded their group so you have to wonder how rigorous an organization like that would be in terms of fighting the entity that actually gives them the money. That was always, um a challenge for community-based organizations especially those who really want to go beyond social service to um activities into full-fledged advocacy, policy advocacy. In some ways, there was a loop involved with many of the Newark's CDC. Many of them began as advocacy, fearless advocacy, efforts to challenging City Hall, demonstrating, raising the clarion call for injustices and problems like poor housing. But as it became more institutionalized and started to create service programs to directly meet the needs of people in the neighborhood, daycare, building some houses, financial assistance, all sorts of very important things. The irony is that when you do that, you start to back off from your advocacy problem, your willingness to stick your head because you became vulnerable to funding pressures through the city or private sources and you don't want the funding cut off for your service program which are very important to people, so you start biting your tongue a bit and I think we can see that. Some groups were creative in addressing that, in unified Vailsburg services organization from my assessment of them. They created their own shields, such as the Vailsburg block association was an independent resident-led organization, which could do that work, which could go to City Hall, complain to City Hall, complain to the mayor and it wouldn't be unified Vailsburg doing it so that they wouldn't feel the direct brunt of saying what are they doing, we will cut off your funding if you keep complaining about the mayor or the council. So, I think there are ways around it but a lot of the groups did sort of ease in to a more institutionalized roles, they were less prone to fighting City Hall. I think the Newark Coalition for Neighborhoods did help in kind of re-spark the kind of ability to do that because it did provide a coalition or collaboration as a, to some degree of cover for individual organizations to raise their voices again. And again, I don't want to go too far along because some individual organizations did still speak out but there was a distinct difference, I think in the quality of how they did it and maybe some degree the vigorousness in which they were going to use in terms of fighting city hall. So, that was an interesting shift in the ...

Robert Curvin: A very, very important point, a very important shift because it distinguishes in a way the difference between groups in the 60s that were really outside of the pale of politics and could not have access to these resources but nevertheless were much more vocal and insistent about creating change. So, I guess what you are suggesting is that there is a trade-off involved that one should get inside and you are able to have those resources to provide

services for someone. You also lose some of your ability to be a critic of the hand that is feeding you.

Richard Cammereri: Well, I think it is interesting and before I starts going into the collaboration groups, which I think really expose the dangers of that shift um, the other issue at play was the political shift was the white to black um the political leadership because that, at [unclear] we used to say, I can't say that again. I heard people say in retrospect the contradictions were very clear in the 60s. You had a white power structure, a white mayor, white cops and for black people I guess some Hispanics, it was clear that it was us and them and you were fighting people who were keeping you down and oppressed. We were not allowed any room for any sort of enfranchisement, um that's I won't say it's easy but it's clear. I've expanded on this before, the political complexion changed in Newark and things became less clear when you have a black person in power suddenly it's not as clear and just as observed, I was observing and accessing, I think it was the blacks who were vicariously opposing disparities and inequities. I had to kind of walk through when we got a black guy now in charge and

Robert Curvin: Many of them joined the government?

Richard Cammereri: became a part of or tried to become part of the solution. Um, it seems that unfortunately and this goes beyond Mayor Gibson, because there were a lot of the things, he had no control over I think and that's in some ways is almost colonial dynamic where all the political complexion changed. Certainly, the economics didn't change, the relation of economics didn't change, the economics was still very much controlled by outside, or people who were not part of the government or the resident and again that was a challenge too for community organizations to shift between us and them and something a little more complicated. Um, it is something that you kind of learn as you go, I think many of the groups tried to adjust and adapt.

Robert Curvin: So, part of this period where you were very active in NCN and eventually became the director of it, um, Gibson was, Mayor Gibson was serving as the Chief Executive of the city. What kind of relationship did the neighborhood groups have with him and his administration?

Richard Cammereri: Um, you know, as I recall, yes Ken was um, Mayor Gibson was the mayor till '86. I was with Newark Coalition for the Neighborhoods in '80 or '81. I became the director in '82 maybe. Um, and I was there until '94. So, as I recall the relationship was fairly good.

Robert Curvin: Very harmonious? And You saw him as being supportive of neighborhood activities and improvement?

Richard Cammereri: The time I was there, yes. His administration seemed to be supportive. I mean there were issues that could have been challenged and some groups did raise issues, longer lines of tax abatements or at least getting more benefits from tax abatements. You know at the time we felt that Al-fael had way more sway than he should have in terms of the economic development of the city and in then in fact we were always giving things away without any promise of some kind of return whether be a job or training and that's the issue that obviously can be debated in terms of what's the proper balance there. The mayor himself always seemed pretty supported of him and his work. It was the time when you had resources available from the Federal Government as I recall for neighborhood type activities as I mention urban crime prevention type issue. So, I don't recall there being much disharmony at that time. I'm sure there were issues but overall, it seems to be a fairly good, comfortable relationship.

Robert Curvin: Can you put through in your view few things that you think that the Gibson's administration accomplished?

Richard Cammereri: Um, they certainly and this would have been expected, they opened up City Hall to become, have a more diversity and to look more like the city in terms of job opportunities. City services starting with the police department improved in terms of the quality of service, the um, cut down issues of police brutality, that sort of thing. You know it was a very tough position for him, for anyone to have been there. Mayor Gibson was probably the only, I guess to kind of thaw with those things. Sometimes you wonder would it have been better to have a guy who would have shaken the tree or who would have really spoken louder about the inequities in the city or fair corporate investments or investments period. Mayor Gibson wasn't that type of personality, he was a quiet person and maybe it was better to have someone with that type of personality to see the city through that initial transition. Um, we would never know obviously and he did what he did. But I think for a person in that position, he probably did as much as anyone could have done, I would guess. Certainly, his first term, I think his first two terms, as []as things went along obviously there was some dissatisfaction groups which is, like he lost Sharpe in '86. I think people began expecting more from the City Hall, from the political leadership in terms of opportunities because it is, the frustrating thing about Newark is that the socio-economics have not changed all that much If you look at the 1970s even to today. Um, the per capita income, poverty rate, the median income is still just seemed to be intractable in their inability to figure out how to boost them up and I think by the time it came his third term, people were looking for something else obviously and that's when Sharpe took the reins.

Robert Curvin: But he had four terms right and that's where the real disappointment began to set in

Richard Cammereri: That's his fourth term, you could hear, I know working in all the neighborhoods and I was fortunate to be in the role that I was because I was working all over the city um, I worked less in Ironbound than other parts of the city and it was a real eye opener because you get to see. Um, number one, even as a Newark resident we are sometimes prone to having a negative image of our own city because we don't see the whole city. And getting to see it, you really understand just the nuances, the type of diversity and unity that's in our city and there are plenty of places in the city that are just fine, you know strong people. One of the frustrations that I've always had with working in neighborhood organizing development is that from the '70s even till today, the people who stuck in this Newark, in these various neighborhoods whether it is Vailsburg, or Clinton Hill, Forest Hill, Weequahic, Roosevelt, Central Ward, um there are a lot of people who stayed whether they wanted to or had to maybe another question and they worked real hard to hold the neighborhoods together even if it was just one block and their dedication and determination really enables to stabilize us as a city so that we could stop to see some of the development that, the gateways, the society hill, the University Heights. But those people never quite, they never really truly acknowledged what they did and obviously we are talking about some older people now. But um without them, you would really have to wonder whether Newark would never been able to stabilize, we saw the small steps towards some kind that could be ascribed as progress but that's a bit of something small growing for many years.

Robert Curvin: Well, it's a very useful point to think about, but it's also a Segway to think about um, what you are suggesting is that an opportunity of an environment to being created by people who are willing to stay and hold things together um, and Gibson was part of that in a way but he was not able to move the city because the city was not ready to be moved that far, but here comes Sharpe and the environment for improvement is, Am I right to think that it was a lot more open, richer in terms of resources, ideas available, people willing to invest

Richard Cammereri: Um, things change and I have to admit that my what happened in the '80s with Sharpe. Sharpe was a much more of a very different personality than Mayor Gibson and most often with Sharpe was booster. He was a great booster for Newark, and much more gregarious, loud, um enjoyed the spotlight and was that a bad thing for Newark? I guess not. I would be among those who felt that um a lot of flash and dazzle with not too much substance and many of the things that happened. I believe it was the Newark Collaboration groups which began, when did it begin two years before Sharpe was elected maybe four years perhaps and that was interesting, a real interesting experience because it was meant to provide a collaborative process for all sectors together, talk about reviving the city, the over used word renaissance and I think someone pointed recently that in renaissance something that had to have died and Newark never died. It was hurt and

down a bit but a lot of people kept it alive and it's still breathing, and that became some of the mantra-renaissance. But the collaboration group was interesting because it showed a kind of dynamic that I think is very, very parallels to grassroots agency because on the surface it was let us all come together and figure out how to raise our city up and the community groups, we in retrospect, I don't think we handled that really well because not a lot of us became vigorously and fully involved because when something like that happens, you sort of created a board. I was on the director of the Newark Coalition of the Neighborhoods which was um people from foundations, from corporate center, universities. You kind of outnumber when it comes to the interest of the regular neighborhood people and you kind of get the worst of both worlds' dynamic in which, well your process all which you have no real control but your presence there legitimizes everything. Well, we have the Newark Coalition of the Neighborhoods, and so of course we are doing what the neighborhoods want, um it is something that neighborhoods group have to be weary of, more clearly, I think more than we do at that time. But also at the time, there was um this idea that um, a sort of funding pressure or intimidation. I saw that, and this is my opinion I saw it clearly and I recall that a head of very good foundation who had done a lot of work in Newark called me to a meeting because I was on the board of Newark Collaboration groups. I thought I had been pretty reasonable in raising issues and concerns when different projects were composed. I would pretty consistently say, what benefit is this to the neighborhood? How would they benefit from this? sort of how the symbolic thing of how the corporate sector might benefit from something whether it is Science Park would have you and um I was sort of called into the principal room, this person who is a very good person sort of chastised me for um, or at least being an obstructionist, why was I always trying to block thing and asks questions, it really illuminated me how careful you have to be with this things because there were resources that were being dangled as a result of Newark Collaboration Groups and I see groups backing off in terms of these resources and it was an unhealthy approach to take in terms of diversity and equity, sort of how you develop a city by learning to segment sectors that had more control than others. I'm sure that there would be people in the collaboration groups who would distinctly disagree with my assessment but I think it is the kind of thing you have to look carefully from a neighborhood perspective um, you also have to be careful with these things, being an essentialist when it comes with neighborhood from Newark. One of the problems I think we make in Newark is that we reflectively suspicious um people who come from outside who say that they want to help, I think we should be, I think at the time we were, it was a healthy skepticism that had been justified based upon things that have happened, but you do have to be open with people, see what they came to bring you if it there is sort of benefit here, whether its immediate or down the line, you have to access that and I think that community groups have become better in doing that but um yeah, all of these things kind of what was happening to Newark in the

'80s. because it was um, again with Sharpe, there was a lot of energy, excitement, a lot of momentum but you had to constantly, as I felt and I think a lot of community groups felt that, you have constantly check. You say well, this momentum where is it was going? How much of this action would result in some tangible benefits to the material condition of our people? In retrospect if you look at things like society hill, or science park or the gateways or NJPAC. Again, things which are I would rather have them than not have them but did they truly provide something OF benefit Newark residents. The numbers say they don't and they still don't to some degree you know, I mean society hill was still better to some degree, about fifteen percent for low income affordability, um which is good that's fine and the society hill did not displace many people because most of the plank was vacant anyway um science park, to a similar degree, I mean people have been, Newark residents are twenty percent this may be across the board but the chain numbers of the council of higher education of Newark, I think 20 percent of the employee based is Newark residents, but if you peel the layers of the onion, 10 percent of the payroll are Newark residents so it gives you the sign of just where people are at the scale, the bottom. You know Sharpe's arrival has always been a bit of contradiction, frustrating to some degree because he did certainly raise the profile, a great booster, um but there was no-to use this little phrase you know a lot of sizzle and not much steak

Robert Curvin: [laughs] Let me take a look and see how we are doing on time. See how much tape we have left. We have about seven minutes and then we would put another tape. Let's go on about Sharpe a little bit more. Um, are there, I mean others have said what we really like in Gibson and with Sharpe in terms of coherence with development that um there really was no planning and that's apparently true, but at the same time the arts center did get built whether it provided the kind of payrolls that you suggest you would prefer. It's there and it's kind of beacon in a way in terms of a lot of people around the state and region. Did he play a role in the other developments that took place in that period of time?

Richard Cammereri: Well, yeah, the Arts Center. Sharpe was um even at that he never had a coherent or vision planning for Newark. Everything seemed to be very reactive and even the arts center. I don't recall the idea starting a Newark. I believe it was probably Governor Kean that seemed to be the biggest advocate in having it in Newark rather than out in the suburbs, I think Morris County was one of the places that was mentioned most frequently. Sharpe, once the idea was raised, was fully on board, and obviously he pushed for the it through the thirty million dollars which is better than ten million dollars even though that's another story and he is clearly was a preforming advocate and um it came. The whole promotion of the arts center was, it has been with many of the types of this trophy project is as an agent for economic development and we could see if you do research on these things

over and over and they are rarely agents of economic developments again, as a Newark resident, I love having the Arts Center here, I go there, I patronize it, I have performed there and so it's great and its beautiful and you cannot find a more beautiful center as it been really well done. Has it been an agent for economic development, I think by any objective measures, No. All of the things I think I recall I think studied my Victoria foundation and we talked about the multiplier center that would happen when we have the arts center, none of which have happened to any degree. Now, Recently, you started seeing some small business developments around downtown, restaurants, that sort of thing which is great and I remember some of us were saying when the arts center was first proposed that perhaps we need to step and look what will work best in terms of economic development. Is it in fact a Lincoln center type of deal or would it be better to try to generate a grant privilege or solo type of programs or approach? For years people talked about Halsey Street to be that sort of development which has shown to be more of a generator of small businesses development, job development, that kind of thing. I mean would Newark had been ready for that and in the mid 90s, or late 90s. I think a lot of groups talked about that, the Halsey Street development, the New Newark Organization which I think was Ray Chambers Initiative which is no more, um, [unclear] really tried and a lot of it comes back to the city just didn't have. It had no really or it seemed like that Sharpe had neither the willingness or the interest or the capacity to do any kind of planning and that was pretty frustrating thing for many of us because we saw, basically we had development by environs, we wanted something but some of us found it suspicious that again a guy like Al-fael had way too much power over the economic development of the city. The fact that he was able to get the FBI building built on the Riverfront which apparently no one wanted, not even the corporate sector, not even Larry Goldman from NJPAC and it is a damn ugly building built despite the opposition of all the sectors is pretty illuminating to me.

Robert Curvin: I am gonna stop the tape and change it now. Um, so let's go talking about the development and Al-fael. How could that have happened that a guy gave that so much individual power and then was able to live with such a tremendous amount of resources that many people believed belong to the city?

Richard Cammereri: Yeah, that's amazing [laughs]. Al-fael was enormous and its absolutely amazing when you think about it. Um, and that's the frustration because you know Sharpe James could have been an incredibly important and great Mayor, I think. He just, he couldn't [breathes a sign of relief] maybe he couldn't see the bigger picture. Somehow, it became more about him just promoting the city rather than doing the things, actually in addition to promoting the city, changing the realities the city and not just trying to change the way people saw it. And his relationship with Faela was predated. Faelas was in place when Mayor Gibson was there and the suspicions seems

to be that he was a very good fundraiser and he probably raised a lot of money for political campaigns. That's the only logical explanation I could come up with on why he had such influences and sway otherwise unless he was doing some voodoo in the backroom and then some sort of um, he was Italian, Italian [unclear], the black politicians in our town, there's no way to explain it. He was able to get away with this and you know it's not just Sharpe, it's not just politicians. When you look at the um, the NEDC, a lot of people are complacent in allowing, I think, complacent in allowing Al to get away with what he got away with. The people on the corporate sector who were on that board either through, there's only two choices with what happened in NEDC why he was able to configure relationships so that he could leave that place owning, actually personally owning assets that belonged to the cities. The only choices were either ignorance or deceit, neither one a particularly good one, so no one comes away from that NEDC story without culpability, to some degree that's not usually the outcomes but it's always bad, you know Al-fael and Sharpe James. No, that board deserves a warrant, a great deal of scrutiny and disdain for what they allowed to happen because that's pretty remarkable and a lot of that goes back to the issue that we didn't have, you know I suspect that many of us who worked in the neighborhoods, who wanted more planning that we were going to accomplish the neighborhood, that we were going to accomplish the Central Business District because you know, sometimes we, neighborhood organizer are tainted to sort of loodeye when it comes to you just want stuffs in the neighborhoods, don't you understand you needed downtown, of course we understand that thriving downtown district would lead new people to come to Newark with higher incomes but we believe that you can do more than one thing at the same time. You can try to attract people with higher incomes, build up the profit tax base, the income base but at the same time, you don't have to ignore the needs that are there. Unfortunately, you need planning to do that, you need some rigorous, comprehensive, coherent planning and it seems to us, sort of seems to me that if we have that kind of planning, certain people would have been bound by the planning and wouldn't have been able to do favors for their friends, wouldn't have been able to get the kind of variances that certain people want, and perhaps paid for, campaign contributions. There was a certain logic, some kind of evil logic to not having planning process that was more institutionalized and more effective and that was what we were left with.

Robert Curvin:

Let me shift the topic a minute, not because everything has been said. I am deeply interested in this whole Al-fael phenomenal by the way. Let me shift to education for a minute and you've been very much involved in the schools and over the years actually served as advisory board for the schools. I am [unclear] the data recently on school performance, I know you are very much aware of it um, there's not much to cheer about when you look around the city. There are a few schools I would say that are okay, they are adequate

but um by and large it is the record of great tragedy really for a community that have schools that are performing so poorly? Why is that the case?

Richard Cammereri: How much tape do you have left? Um, I mentioned that there are big five issues every city faces – housing, healthcare, economic/employment opportunities, public safety, and education. Um, they are all inter-related and education is probably more vulnerable to the kind of pressures those other issues exert on an urban environment maybe any environment but particularly an urban environment and that's not an excuse for our system not doing a better job. It is an explanation as to why it is difficult and challenging um one of the problems, we've had been that, I was on the Newark advisory Board and we've been under state control of school district since 1995 and that's almost fifteen years so we have an advisory board and I was on it for two terms that's six years. Um I failed the re-election in 2008. Although, I still attend almost all the board meetings probably more than some of the people that were elected, so they are not getting rid of me, they don't know what to do with me, what's this guy doing, he's not on the board no more, why is he still coming to board meetings. The issue of education is so critical to the quality of life in the city and one brief example is society hill for instance, when that was built in the late 80s, you had, I think some people were probably surprised, you had people waiting to buy those houses there in the central ward, a lot of young couples, but what began to happen is that when they began to have children of school age, they moved out. They moved to Maplewood, they moved to South Orange and they started renting out their condos and that's an example of how important the school system. As a Newark resident, I have been here all my life, you know my children went to the local school. It was a private school but community based and they went there. When I ran the school board, I tell people that my kids aren't in public school, I'm not going to gamble my kid's education but I understand how important for Newark residents so if you want to use that against me as a Newark Board member, no that's your prerogative but also understand that some of this work in the city, I know what it is, I understand what it is and people felt it was okay and they did elect me twice. You know, we had in our district I guess under state control, the issue was there was no and obviously I'm still trying to clarify my own thinking on this. The issue is I don't want to be unfair um in my assessment because education was not my area of expertise or experience but I think I gained some common sense and what I saw was a persistent lack of urgency in running some district, in saying we've got to do something to change things around year after year, it was kind of the same there's is to it. We are either making some progress or worse case we were actually deluding ourselves to thinking we were making some progress than it was. The graduation rate was often targeted as a positive sign, but many of us who look at the numbers ourselves and realize that the graduation rate was not accurate and was being tampered by the administration. Um there was this passivity about how we are running this.

There was no real urgency in how we analyze, no sense of wanting to be data driven in how we analyze, no real sense of analyzing. In fact it is the similarity between the educational system the way it is been run and the city itself because our educational system had no real planning, rather was no real attempt to say that we can say okay where are we and the district was not a disaster, was not a complete disaster and the things that were working decently could have been enhanced but the efforts was never made to step back and look at the whole school district and again, our school budget is larger than the whole city budget to say okay where are we, what's working, what's not working, what needs to be enhanced, what needs to be thrown out, what needs to stay the way it is, that kind of planning and assessment just wasn't done. And I think people felt it, the level of expectations was way too low, the level of tolerance and that's something we kind of experience overall in the city. Um, I remember, not to sound like an old headgear but when just overall our sense of tolerance and expectations. Our expectations are very high of what we expect to happen in our city, what we expected to of our elected officials, what we expected of our school system, what we expected to have in our city um what we expected of ourselves in our neighborhoods and our tolerance is very low for nonsense whether it was the kind of language that we used there on the streets or at the bus or from our kids and slowly but surely the equation have shifted to our tolerance is up here for all kind of wrongful stuffs and how expectations have become very low. Um how do we shift that back, we got to get, we gat to revert that to where it used to be um.

Robert Curvin: What's the answer to that though? We have to shift that but how do we do that?

Richard Cammereri: You know, I think that's a hard one to answer. You can invade and complain all you want obviously. I think the answer number one is to be able to look at ourselves and our city in a way that is truthful and clear without any sort of illusion. One of the very good things that the new Superintendent is doing is um and that is very helpful is telling the truth, the new Superintendent is Dr. Clifford Jeanie who just arrived here back in August. In the interest of full disclosure, I was on the selection committee so I do feel that somewhat invested in this guy's success as I told him, so I'm going to challenge him whenever necessary and support him whenever possible, but the first thing he did was to step back and clearly look at where the district stood in terms of its numbers, its achievement rate, its data and um particularly the graduation rate. That was the first thing that he started doing and I think 80% graduation rate is actually closer to 55 or 60. You have to access yourself clearly and honestly before you can make any progress to some degree, being addicted to something you have to admit that you are addicted before you can start any kind of recovery process. We need people who are willing to tell the truth, who are willing to look at things objectively, who will be willing to speak honestly and work with people around them whether

it's, in terms of education whether it's the parents, the corporate sector, the government sector, whatever sector of higher education to say how do we turn this around. Well, I don't have an answer for the educational system except that we need to start there looking at the overall assessment of where we are to develop solutions for it. Now, there are somethings that I know are clear um we have way too many principals in the district who cannot and will not do the job. I do know that one thing I can learn clearly was that if you wannna know how school are stacked up and not just in terms of its test number but just the culture of the school, you can walk up to schools and proclaim that you have a very bright creative energetic feel to the schools displayed by these students in these hallways and you know that the principal is someone that is on it, that gets it and who has his teachers in line, who supports them, helps them when they need help but there are other schools too where you don't see that, they will have things on the wall, student's works which have mistakes, and that always drives me crazy. You know you go to a school and almost all the schools would have stuffs on the wall, students' essay. I mean I saw things that had misspellings, that had grammatical errors and you wonder that what the hell is happening, how can a teacher allow that to be put on the wall and that's an example of what I was saying in terms of expectations. I was an English major in college and did some proofreading so I am very particular about that, but you need that kind of detail with our kids which is especially wrong with education. You cannot allow mistake of any kind; you've got to constantly teach our kids that everything matter, that everything counts.

Robert Curvin: So, with many years of state supervision, without going through all the details was your state supervision positive or negative or somewhere in between?

Richard Cammereri: Um, I think overall it was negative on the state. You know what the state did in 1995, it did start in 1989 in Jersey City, Paterson in '93 and then Newark in '95. What they did was just um, it was wrong and dumb and I think it was very much informed by a racial attitude that felt that these cities, these are black cities run by black people and so nothing could be right there. I don't think they were very much concerned about education. The issue there was more money than education, the professed reason was education but if you look at what happened, if you look at 1995 before the state take over and there was a test of high school Proficiency Assessment and there was an alternative test called SRA and I don't remember what that stands for but the alternative test was for students who could not pass the High School Proficiency Exam. In 1995, when the state took over, several of our students were passing the regular High School examination. Last year, 75% were passing the SRA and that's a very dull hatchet to use but those kinds of numbers you can ignore. What the state should have done exactly what they are talking about now. If the saw problems, or they though

they saw problems in money management, district then you intervene in that area.

Robert Curvin: But there are a lot of possibilities or a lot of potential reasons with that decline in the corner. Something relating to population change or demographics, teaching quality, local supervision as well or state supervision.

Richard Cammereri: Yes, the numbers with education are tempting sometimes and I have been prone to this to go with the numbers. Um, there are a lot of factors that go into the performance level at our school, and again you don't want to be just logged into the numbers themselves, the numbers are very important you know I debate with people sometimes you feel, well it's not about tests, it's about the culture in the schools and making the kids feel good about themselves and I'm all for that but if we cannot read and compute at grade level, then we are doing something wrong that's the bottom line. So, again unbalanced, I don't think state control helped much at all. It should have been an approach where if they saw an issue they would come in and work with the district on that issue but instead they took a hammer rather than a scapple approach, took just over and which was a whole lot of people. They brought in [] which was the State Superintendent who may have been great for the district. She is doing well from what I read powerful stuffs in Atlanta but these things also matter the way you do these things. You could bring in the best person in the world but if they are inserted in a way that generates a lot of controversy and distraction, that's not good for anyone and as it turns out I think she was there for just about two years.

Robert Curvin: The local people here basically ran around [unclear] Isn't that, right?

Richard Cammereri: The old guard education system as she you know I wasn't directly involved with the district head, so most of my information was second hand either reading it or hearing it from people who were in town that there were issues of the way she [laughs] you know, the more personality issues, the way she dealt with people, the way she um and you would have hoped, but you would have thought people will be smarter enough on the states end. If you are gonna take something over, make sure you do your ground work, help the new person understand what they are dealing with, maybe so that you can deal with things a different way so that but what happened, happened.

Robert Curvin: I'm going to leave education for a while even though very little has been said because there are a couple of other topics that I really want to get through. One is the arena, um and um much has been said by arena boosters about how it's important to the city. Um, what about the deal, do you think the city is getting or is likely to get it money's worth from um, the arena.

Richard Cammereri: Well, from what I've seen so far, no, and um I was part of the group that um that sued the city, the Sharpe James administration and the city council because of the financing skill that they developed to finance the arena. We felt he was um not the best use of some very valuable resources which was the Ellis resources from the port authority-the airport, sea port. [laughs]. Everything that was said about NJPAC is the same thing that was said about the arena, agent for economic development, it may have all these multilayer effects, there will be ancillary development in the neighborhoods around it and based upon what they saw with NJPAC, it is skeptical. It didn't happen in NJPAC at least not yet, we are going on ten plus years, so should we expand here we are talking about a three hundred-million-dollar arena, the city footing at least about two hundred and ten million at least initially at that but its more now and it will continue to be more. And it just didn't seem to make a lot of sense from the financial point of view. You know, if the New Jersey doubles wanted to build an arena, then great I'm not against having an arena here but here to use that much money in a city with such great need. Um, just on a face up it didn't make a lot of sense but we were willing to look at it, to analyze it, to see that um you know if it did, fine but from the beginning it was clear, and this goes back a few years ago that Mayor James always wanted something, he really wanted a legacy project, um something about the sports seem to be very high on his list []. I agree with him and many people who felt that the Metaland Sports Center should have been in Newark and this goes back to the '70s of course um but that never happened for a lot of reasons. Racial subjects were probably very prominent in that thinking by politicians, but um if the city when negotiations was going on in the port authorities, the sea port. We knew something was brewing because split for the first time, this is when the bill was split one for the airport, one for the sea port. As it turned out, the um, I forgot which one that was, the lease for the sea port was designated where the city would get 12 million dollars per year for thirty-five years which was kind of low, I thought but Newark had been getting ripped off by port authorities for many years and that's an incredible invaluable asset. For many years, we were just getting million dollars a year and I think Donald Tucker finally pushed to negotiate a new contract back in the '80s. But as it turned out that lease – twelve million dollars for thirty-five years was bothered up from current value of the 210 million dollars that the city would have to pay for the arena.

Robert Curvin: It was the seaport lease?

Richard Cammereri: It was one of the leases, I have more details on this. The other um, I mean it was a brilliant maneuver to whoever thought about this thought it out because what the city did was instead of having the money of the city directly paid to the city budget, which is part of our lawsuit, the money went directly to a third party which was the Newark Housing authority and they in fact owned all the lands in fact all the entity that bothered the money so

the group that sued the city sued it based on the fact that these are revenues that bypassed the city budget process. Um, we lost the law suit. We went to the local finance board, lost there, we had some suspicion of some political maneuvering going on but it happened.

Robert Curvin: Beside yourself, who were the others?

Richard Cammereri: It was a group of score and there were individual residents. We had the pierces who were about the street, a couple of ironbound residents, um there was one person from Weequahic, um I'll get you the names of people. So, it was a relative of small group of tenants who will pull together and who testified in various hearings, the mayor created a blue-ribbon commission and this is fascinating because it shows the kinds of power that um political influence can have. The blue area commission was entity that had some negative groups on it. The Casio was on it, I've had this discussion with Reno to Casio about it. I think um, I recall Zach Amber was on it. Beth Hobbs was the chair and this was the commission who was going to analyze whether this was a good deal for Newark. All they did was compare this deal to other single sport arenas, they didn't look at what's the best use for 210 million dollars. Should we build a convention center, should we look at an organic development such as the Halsey Street area, should we build an arena, that wasn't done. All they did was compare this arena deals to other arena deals and they came up with a fairly lukewarm seem to me that yeah this is okay. What was at stake at the course was the fact that seem to me well it is okay. What was on state of the course was the fact that

Robert Curvin: Were you on the finishing? [unclear]

Richard Cammereri: No, I try to. The one and only meeting that the group, that's this blue-ribbon commission had was advertised with an astrologer that was talked back in not even the sports section but like the business section, one of those small business ads, and some of us found out about it. We went to Seton Hall law school where the hearing was and raised a variety of issues and then when we waited for a response by the blue-ribbon commission. We were told that the commission would not have any response, we would record your issues and thank you for coming. And I looked at people who I knew around this commission and had worked with and they just sat there totally silent.

Robert Curvin: Like Reno Casio?

Richard Cammereri: Yeah, Reno and some others. I've forgotten the others. I mean I have the blue-ribbon commission report, the files but um that's was really disappointing to me. The fact that not one of the city's CDCs in the city spoke out about this.

Robert Curvin: Why do you think that has stopped?

Richard Cammereri: They were just ...

Robert Curvin: They were terminated or bought off?

Richard Cammereri: I doubt they were even bought off. I think they just didn't want the wrath of Sharpe's administration

Robert Curvin: Let me ask you this

Richard Cammereri: Oh wait, I'm sorry the thing about [unclear] that particularly burned me up was that you know no one and I raised this to the newspaper. You know Bath Hobbs and the City Hall Law School; they were looking for lands in the city to build a dormitory and so the appearance of the property was there because how do you have the person who heads the blue-ribbon commission who clearly wants something from the city in a position of pretending to be totally objective. You know the quid pro pro was in my mind and several minds quite clear.

Robert Curvin: Did they get the land?

Richard Cammereri: They eventually would be getting it because that was part of the Mayor Bruker's state of the city address but certainly didn't want to do anything to antagonize Sharpe's administration to get in the way of that, but the problem was the whole thing was done behind close doors. There was no transparency in the process, um if in fact the arena was the best deal then great but to talk about that kind of money. The fact that some of the things that are happening now, we warned the city about. You know the way the deal was struck. Now, the devils are not paying their rent, their first-year rent. There was no true intention or agreement, clauses in this thing. There is no way for the Housing Authority or this downtown development or the agency can even easily access what the revenue projection is for the arena because this is all under the control of the devils. You know Mayor James wanted this arena in the worst way and that's how they city got it. It is like the gift that was taking and taking. We are spending about \$20,000 a night for an event um overtime. It is just, it's an awful deal but if there is any way. Mayor Bruker tried to do a re-assessment of it to see what can be changed but not much can. I used to be a fan of the devils but now I'm not a fan.

Robert Curvin: This is um, in a way when you look at the role of Prudential and the arena. You can say that Prudential is also one of the heavy's that's driving this thing. What I find difficult is as to how you really evaluate the role of a corporation like that because on one end, I see a lot of positive things that Prudential does in the city but on the other end, I see somethings where Prudential gets some pretty sweet deal from the city. For example, having the city uses its federal money that was designated for other things to build

its employee garage. It's hard for me to think of another corporation in the city that has done as much as Prudential for Newark. I, um, I know as an old activist, leftists etc. I am sure that would be surprising for many people coming out of my mouth. Prudential's decision for example to build a gateway right after 1967 is almost in parallel inappropriate behavior. Maybe their investments in Newark are so deep and so huge that they can escape that might be the case but how do you, I'm really genuinely interested in hearing how you think about this and how you measure the corporate world.

Richard Cammereri: Well, you are right because Prudential is an interesting phenomenal because that was the last group in Newark all our lives. It's always been there, literally, the big white monument downtown. The big building that was built in the '60s Prudential has done a lot of good things, service projects that kind of thing and you know that's good, that's important. You know it's hard, maybe it's unfair to impose on them my value system.; It's a corporation and they have gotten significant value from the city. They haven't done something for nothing. I'll have to admit that even with the gateway, I have to find [laughs]. I don't want to give them much benefit from my biased view of corporations that they didn't build the gateway out of the goodness of their heart. They had to have some kind of economic analysis that ultimately, we would make money by staying here but you are right, I mean if it wasn't. They did have some old timers there who I think probably felt some allegiance to Newark in some way. You know yeah maybe they could have gone to somewhere else. But I have to think that if the balance sheet wasn't to their benefit it wasn't going to happen and be it as it may, there are a very important part of Newark and they have to be more important in terms of employment resources. I don't think, and this is something I have never been able to find out in organizing, just what is the employment profile of prudential. That's not an easy thing to get in terms of how many Newark residents actually work there. Um, it would be the, um, you don't want to really trash them because without the corporate sector in Newark, we would be Camden. I'm not insulting Camden. But if you talk about urban issues, at least we have some kind of resources that we can play off to some degree whether it Prudential or PSEG, that sort of thing. So, um how do you, and this is part of the planning process. How do you make the most of the corporate presence, you know one of the things and stepping back to the arena? One of the things that we mentioned over and over to Mayor James was if you are so intent on building this damn thing with that much money, at least get the naming rights for the city and that's never, I don't know why, they never happen. Of course, Prudential comes in and they get the naming right for a \$110, 000. The devils get back their money and we would be being the ball for years and years to come. I think they are corporate sectors like Prudential who gets it that they need to create more development in the city that's broader and deeper but it's not what it should be, if you look at the, now it's not the best time to talk about it, the best time is during the cessionary. You know I still don't think Prudential was doing

the easy things by that I mean funding for services, funding for tutoring which was good but they weren't as much as part of the solution in terms of economic development, job training, opening jobs for Newark residents as they probably could have been. That's my assessment, that's my perspective. Yeah, I want to keep them here. I would like to generate more discussion as to how they could be here.

Richard Curvin: And this is a very critical point. You know I'm quite familiar with all of the urban literature that generally has either taken the view that corporations are evil or they are part of the power structure that is almost impenetrable as you know you got to fight your way in and so on but I see a much more complicated and sometimes even fuzzy picture because um likewise I would say the same thing about Ray Chambers. Over the years, I would think that we would not be way we are in some respects if not for his leadership and investments and certain things that have happened in the city. On the other end, I think he has also gotten some interesting paybacks, the arena being one of them even though he claims that he doesn't own the arena. You see where I'm.

Robert Cammereri: Yeah. Trying to access people who want to help is always interesting. You know you need stuffs, you need resources, you need money, you need help, you need wealth and wealthy people. Um, but for too long it almost seems like an either-or thing. We had to knock down our low-income housing and get rid of it because we need to raise our income level in the city. It doesn't have to be either or, we shouldn't ignore the needs that exists and at the same time, you can welcome new people who wanna be here, who are smart enough to want to be in Newark, who understand that Newark isn't, that there are a lot of nuances in our city, all kinds of pretty neighborhoods in Newark, that it is not just shootings that kind of thing. Again, too often like I said it was almost an either-or thing um, you have to be weary of the missionary impulse we have, I've given speeches, I've talked with many visitors that we have here in the [] throughout you have people in the suburbs who come to help, community gardens, community cleanups which is great. I hate seeing that, I hate to see a group of white people from the suburbs come down and. They are cleaning up a lot somewhere and there is no resident with them. It's just um, it just feels wrong and it kind of propose the sort of missionary impulse, I think. I tell people if you want to help out Newark, then great rather than going back to where you live and vote for the same retro grey politician who don't give a damn about urban policies and who in fact promote legislation that harms the city. Why are you coming, are you coming to make yourself good for a few hours, so you really, I don't think I'm that harsh with that, you really have to make people understand that there are all kinds of interconnections and if you want to come help in the city, great. We are reasonable people; we like help but understand that there are different interconnections at play, there are causes and there are effects. The effect you see here in Newark are the result of

things, not just individuals in the city. There are personal accountability issues on residents who might litter among other things but there are broader issues that are at play as to why you see what you see in Newark, at least in parts of Newark because it is very important and we've both done this before, taking tours of the city. When I take the people around the city, I take them all over, you know the good, the bad, the nuanced. If I had a dollar of every time someone took someone on a tour in the all of Newark, if I had a dollar for every time, they say wow this is Newark. You know I'll be able to fill up my gas tank. People don't understand. They have a very tunnel vision.

Robert Curvin: People don't understand the variety and diversity in the city.

Richard Cammereri: There are people who won't get it, there are people who won't understand, there are people who have a poor opinion of Newark and they will never change because the only time they will change is when they have less black and brown people in Newark. So those people, I'm not gonna worry about them, I think the majority of people probably can be swayed if they really saw that its real. That's it, it's a, it's all kind of stuffs

Robert Curvin: Let me switch to another topic that makes Newark all kind of places to really understand and that is the impact of poverty in the city. Do you see any gaps or ways in which the city could be more thoughtful, intelligent, enlightened even in the reality that close to a third of our population is living below poverty level?

Richard Cammereri: That has been the um, the historical challenge. We have I think it's about 26% poverty rate, we have about 40% of a population that's living not too far above poverty rate. Um, addressing that, as always with these issues cannot be a one size fit all model. I go back to the, primarily the issue of economic development and opportunity, we have majority of Newark residents and people in poverty want to work. Sometimes you have to say that to yourself, majority of the people who are below poverty and unemployed did not want to be unemployed. They want to work, they want to be able to support their families, they want to advance economically. Sometimes it's just had to be said because you will sort of accept the percentage data with no humanity in it. That being said, what do you do about it. There are things that have been done around the city and I remember I researched the neighborhoods back in the early '90s. In 2001, I was working with um councilman, Bruker and we put together the first source which required businesses that come to Newark to receive the financial incentive of twenty-five thousand dollars or more, to use Newark residents as their first source for jobs interviews. I'm not gonna lie because we were not gonna force people. The thinking was this are the salary numbers, these are the skillset that we needed because when we are ready, get your people ready because we have only a fifteen day within which we

would interview the people. So, the information we get whether it was in the community, la casa, Essex County saying let's get our people ready for these jobs theoretically, it would have been a win-win, we get people who are skilled for the job because we don't want people who are not qualified for the job, they get qualified trainings and this has been used in other cities as a source of economic change and has passed around the city. Unfortunately, Donald Tucker and Cory Bruker were the sponsors interesting and aligns with that. Um, the change in administration did implement it. And that's the kind of policy and operational strategy that can be used, that might provide opportunities for opening specific job opportunities and you know obviously won't be feeling the higher, technical, clearly, it could be a minor approach, it could be the educational system has to be brought into this because we have to start graduating kids that are more job oriented than they are currently. I'm encouraged that the new Superintendent is much more willing to put the higher education in collaboration with for example the research institute. Um, we should, the quality of housing, the issue of housing and where people live in, how's that coming to play in terms of how people have the sense of opportunities for themselves. You sort of have to get pulled back and I think this administration with their master plan re-examination report has made a very good start. The Bruker administration and that's a very good start. Tony Griffith is a master planner, that's the kind of document that really took a step back, looked at the entire city, looked at the current resident, engaging student more in the light of the city, engaging the police, the corporate sector, um and seeing the interconnections, the patterns of how the city works and how to target the issues like poverty. We want a city that is a better place to live and really it will be, we also want to keep a humane city. That doesn't just keep people out, it just embraces them because they are part of how city and helps them become less poor. You know two ways to reduce poverty in our city get rid of the poor people or you also help them raise their income.

Robert Curvin: Um, you didn't mention the early childhood education by the way

Richard Cammereri: Um, that's been one of the success stories

Robert Curvin: You have to give the state credit for making that happen.

Richard Cammereri: Yes, that's has been a distinct success story although accurately the state has placed a huge role on that because they were forced to do it, they had to do it but nevertheless it's a really good example of also collaboration, the court made the mandate and the state provided the money, but then you also have a lot of community groups, la casa, a lot of CDCs were and you could see the result. Not only great first second and third graded you see the result of test scores rising. The problem is once they hit the middle school grade the fifth, sixth, seventh eighth, suddenly the young black males, the

numbers suddenly decline and that's need to be addressed especially the young black males, that is due to their environment. The pressures of whatever, if they are living in poor neighborhoods, gang activities, again it comes back to trying to see the city as a whole. You know its um and the thing is it's a lot easier to do that in Newark is because it's such a small city, literally small. The thing is when people ask me how come you guys haven't, you've only had two mayors in twenty-six years with that. How come it's so hard to organize people in the city, to fight people in the city and you haven't been able to fight city hall. The thing is when you have a city like Newark that is literally so small, only twenty-four square miles, the people you would depend on, I tell you that they are working class people and middle-income people. They work for city hall; they work for housing authority and they are vulnerable to pressures because we have a really small type vibe in the city. If you end up doing anything that involves any consequence in any sector, eventually you will you will meet them in other sectors, that smallness that is both an opportunity and a challenge.

Robert Curvin: So, you are suggesting that its small has also limit the ability to act, from taking on institutions because they are so inter-related

Richard Cammereri: I think that's the case. You know one of the things with the Bruker administration which I supported I'm not a Bruker disciple. It probably would be a good thing to break up the scar tissue that has built up over the last twenty-six years. Um, and to have something new and um Mayor Bruker would be relatively short leashed. If he screwed up, most probably it won't have been easier to get him out than to put if we had another four terms of Sharpe James. He had personally nothing against Sharpe, that was my opinion. People are probably a willing more to speak although you do have the same dynamics, people are still weary over city hall you know and the Bruker administration has done a few things which I find very questionable even the James Gibson administration didn't try to do, some of the

Robert Curvin: For example,

Richard Cammereri: And I know the people organizing this, I liked them personally, the super neighborhood strategy. First, it was an old term that we called super neighborhood covenant in the '60s [SNCC] that's another acronym for the '60s and that's just been old folly, I guess. Um it was something that was, like a few other things. It was imposed, this is what we are doing isn't this wonderful? You know a couple of people went to Houston, found this model, Leadership Newark people and I'm on the selection committee. They threw together the old model map and created the super neighborhood, you know Weequahic. Some people will say that how do you know it's the old model city that they are using, I knew because it's the same area and Springfield Belmont is a very good tip that they are using the old model.

And it's just a model that was imposed and was set up and I think is set up to be a gatekeeper. So, they created this gatekeeper organizations, which you would have to go to get things done which is kind of not working very well

Robert Curvin: But he is rightfully worried about re-election, so I think that a strategy like this has to be seen in context of putting together your building watch for a campaign like this [laughs]

Richard Cammereri: Yes, but it also promoted a social service, community improvement, you know. These other guys had the civic associations and it was clear and because it was the civic association, this is what they do, they never tried to, you know Sharpe never tried to create his own community-based organization but this is a very different animal.

Robert Curvin: It may have been more sophisticated than the Ken-Gibson Association. Generally, the Sharpe James birthday parties

Richard Cammereri: Cory too has done birthday parties. In the arena, he had one, but then even now I mean they do good stuffs, good programs. you know the word now is that there is some sort of hypocrisy in that organization and I talked about gate-keeping, Oprah Winfrey money but um very interesting.

Robert Curvin: Interesting in what respect?

Richard Cammereri: Well, that apparently Newark now gave Oprah Winfrey a list of agencies in Newark that she could contribute to, um this was soon after the special luncheon last year, the special support luncheon that Charlie [unclear] won. Charlie was supported by Steven Adubato and then in December Oprah Winfrey ends up given half a million dollars to Robert Treat Charter School, some people say it's just a coincidence, some other say political bail, um so its um

Robert Curvin: You mentioned Robert Treat academy, let's talk about Steve Adubato who in my view is probably the most powerful political icon in Newark, um why none and would you agree with that?

Richard Cammereri: Yeah, right now. He certainly is seeing results that's for sure.

Robert Curvin: What are the roots of that, to have that incredible power that the Italian Americans goons hold remains in the northward um where a few Italian Americans families still live where many have gone to the shores, or Essex County, or the suburbs. Um, he still manages to affect the way organize the democratic structure both in the northward and increasingly in another parts pf the city as well. I think hardly anybody would come to Newark looking to build something or do something without stopping by to see him and um

he is, you talk about the state election, every state leader will probably stop by to see him as well. What is the root of all this? Smart organizing?

Richard Cammereri: He is a very smart guy, the thing is Steve Adubato um number one is that he is smart, he knows what he is doing, the fact is that it is fascinating um I'm sure he loves having people talking about him. It is a fascinating combination of impulses. He is um, clearly, he wants to serve the community.